Creating a Gay-Straight Alliance in a Boys School: Challenges & Rewards
Approx. 3000 in U.S. schools (GLSEN, 2011)
53% of public high schools in California (GSA Network, 2016)

Gay-straight alliances now mandatory in Alberta: ‘We’re no longer that redneck, roughneck province’
Workshop Agenda

1) Keeping in mind « why »
2) Vocabulary activity
3) Why GSAs are needed
4) How to start a GSA
5) What a GSA can do – examples
6) Selwyn House case study – noticeable impacts
7) Criticism & Difficulties
8) Discussion & Questions
WHY?

Selwyn House vision statement:

VERITAS
- Be true to yourself
- Be true to others
- Be true to your school
LGBTQ what?!

• L = lesbian
• G = gay
• B = bisexual, bigender – (pansexual)
• T = transexual, transgender, two-spirit
• Q = queer, questioning
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Gender Identification</th>
<th>Activity</th>
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<td>man</td>
<td>masculine</td>
<td>transitioning</td>
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<td>male</td>
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<td>attracted to women</td>
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It’s our responsibility!

1) Keeping students safe is our duty
2) Doing our share to actively prevent bullying is our legal responsibility
Québec Policy Against Homophobia (2009)

The Québec Policy Against Homophobia was launched in December 2009 by the Minister of Justice.

Its four main guidelines:

• recognize the realities faced by sexual minority members;
• promote respect for the rights of sexual minority members;
• promote wellbeing;
• ensure a concerted approach.
Québec Bill 56 – An Act to Prevent and Stop Bullying & Violence in Schools (2012)

• Requires that every public and private educational institution adopt and implement an anti-bullying and anti-violence plan
• Requires that every school principal set up an anti-bullying and anti-violence team and designate a school staff member to coordinate its work

• Each school action plan must include:
  - prevention measures to put an end to all forms of bullying and violence based, among other things, on racism, **sexual orientation, sexual identity, homophobia**, a disability or a physical characteristic, as well as prevention measures to encourage the collaboration of parents in putting an end to bullying and violence and in creating a healthy and secure environment

• School personnel are responsible for protecting students from violence & intimidation
Other examples...

Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights Act (2011)

• Garden State Equality political advocacy group chairman Steve Goldstein has called it « the toughest anti-bullying law in the country »
• Requires schools to develop a plan that outlines how they will address bullying and all teachers and administrators must be trained to identify and respond to bullying
• Requires that every school have an anti-bullying specialist and a school safety team
• Requires that every public school report all cases of bullying or teasing to the state.
• 1st week of October = “Week of Respect” (education & awareness)
U.S. federal law

- If a public school has one student-led non-curriculum club that meets outside of class time, it must allow other such clubs to be organized and provide them with equal access to meeting spaces and resources.
- Schools must allow a GSA if there is a student need.
- A school can opt-out by not allowing any non-curriculum clubs.
- « Officials need not endorse any particular student organization, but federal law requires that they afford all student groups the same opportunities to form, to convene on school grounds, and to have access to the same resources available to other school groups. » (Duncan, 2011, p. 2)
Boys as GLOBAL CITIZENS

Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)

- Article 1: “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.”

- Article 26: (1) Everyone has the right to education. [...] (2) Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.
GSA = a win-win

• Gay-straight alliances in schools reduce suicide risk for all students (Saewyc, Konishi, Rose, & Homma, 2014)
• Schools with a GSA have a more accepting climate where students feel safe (Kosciw, 2007)
• Offer a place where straight students can learn about LGBT issues
• Offer resources to students who are questioning their sexuality
• Help students understand a gay sibling or relative
• Study in Massachusetts → more than 50% of public schools have a GSA → these schools report more supportive climates for LGBT students (Szalacha, 2003)
• Link established between victimization and lower academic outcomes & self-esteem, as well as school-based supports and better academic outcomes (Kosciw, J. G., Palmer, N. A., Kull, R. M., & Greytak, E. A., 2013)
Starting a GSA

GLSEN
(Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network)
jump-start guide
Available at: glsen.org
1) Get informed (attend a workshop, research, ask others) – need to be prepared to answer questions from the community

2) Get administration to « buy in » – why it’s important, our legal responsibilities, intentions (reassure), show it is done elsewhere with positive impacts
3) **Try to find allies in the school** – colleagues, students who are « out » (male-female advisor model)

4) **Prepare for 1st meeting**
   - decide on audience (all students? faculty? staff? parents?)
   - introduce idea to school
   - set agenda
   - think about location
   - snacks?

5) **First meeting** – suggestions:
   - identify obstacles to more inclusive environment in your school
   - set goals/mission statement
   - brainstorm activity ideas
Selwyn House
GAY-Straight
Alliance

Would you like Selwyn House to be a safe and supportive place for all students, teachers and staff? Are you someone who identifies as LGBTQ or as an LGBTQ ally and would like to help foster this kind of environment? Would you simply like to know you have someone to talk to or meet meaningful role models? Join the Selwyn Gay-Straight Alliance! All students and staff welcome.

MISSION:

1. Educate
2. Promote Inclusiveness
3. Celebrate Diversity

Want to help? Want to join? Want to talk?
Your Alliance advisors:
M. Grondin
Mme Thériault
5) Register your GSA?
What can a GSA do?

Case study: Selwyn House School (Montréal, QC)
Triangle campaign

• Indicate a safe space or staff member to students
• See GLSEN’s Safe Space Kit (free downloads)
The Selwyn Gay-Straight Alliance presents…

MOVIE NIGHT

When? Wednesday
October 9th, 2013
@ 17:30

Where?
Rossy Agora

Who is invited?
All parents, Senior School students, and staff

The GSA will briefly begin the session by presenting its mission and goals for the year. An open discussion will follow the movie.

Snacks will be provided.

Prayers for Bobby tells the true story of Mary Griffith, a mother whose religious beliefs led her to reject her gay son. After living with the guilt of her son’s suicide, she becomes a prominent human rights activist and advocate for gay youth.

Featuring
the award-winning film

PRAYERS FOR BOBBY

Please RSVP by email to Mme Thériault (theriaultm@selwyn.ca)
Create a 30-second original video that showcases what it's like to be different and aims to celebrate diversity in your community.

TO PARTICIPATE:
- MS & SS students are eligible
- Max. 5 students per team
- Obtain guidelines from & submit registration form to Mme Thériault (theriaultm@selwyn.ca)

Finalist videos will be shown at a school Assembly.

SUBMISSION DATE: December 1st 2014 (16:00)

PRIZE: Paid lunch out for 1st place
VIDEO CONTEST

No Homophobia in VERITAS

Create a 30-second original video that aims to convince others to join the fight against homophobia.

TO PARTICIPATE:
- MS & SS students are eligible
- Max. 5 students per team
- Obtain guidelines from & submit registration form to Mme Thériault (theriaultm@selwyn.ca)

Finalist videos will be shown at a school Assembly.

SUBMISSION DATE: May 21st 2014 (before 16:00)

PRIZE: Paid lunch out for 1st place
Show us the impact of being **open-minded** in a 30-second original video!

**SUBMISSION DATE:**
March 30, 2016 by 4 PM

*A mind is like a parachute.*
**IT DOESN’T WORK IF IT ISN’T OPEN.**

Finalist videos (teams of max 5 people) will be shown at a school assembly!

**PAID LUNCH OUT FOR 1ST PLACE**

**SPONSORED BY THE**
**GAY-Straight Alliance**

**AS PART OF**
**Diversity Week**
A few examples of winning videos…
Staff Training

Many free workshops are probably available in your area
Resources in the library...and making them known.
Encourage staff to integrate LGBTQ resources into their curriculum

Reading lists, guest speakers, films, etc.
Interested in a TAG Mini-workshop?

Members of the GSA will visit your TAG group to help your students:

- Become aware of LGBTQ-related language
- Learn appropriate terms related to sexuality, gender expression and gender identity
- Explore the connotation associated with certain language and its impacts

An interactive activity suited to advisors who wish to create a safe space in their group or classroom
Le 17 mai, je soutiens la Journée Mondiale de Lutte Contre l’Homophobie !
Breaking Down the Walls Experience

BREAKING DOWN WALLS!
Guest speaker: Mark Tewksbury (1992 Olympic gold medalist)

Fan Day
Cultural Quiz

Resource table in cafeteria

LGBT Resources

Documentary on homophobia in sports
In the spirit of celebrating diversity in our community, Selwyn House will host an international food fair where you will be able to taste flavors originating from around the world.

**WANT TO PARTICIPATE?**

We are looking for parents & students wishing to share a bit of their culture by delighting our taste buds with a traditional menu item.

ALL PROCEEDS will benefit a local charity that promotes diversity.

**DATE:** April 8 2014  
**TIME:**  
SS = 12:30-13:00  
MS = 13:00-13:30  

**WHERE:** Coristine Hall  

**FOOD TICKETS WILL BE ON SALE AT THE DOOR**
Gender neutral & diverse family inclusive forms

• Do your school forms still ask for « mother & father »?
• Is asking gender on a form really relevant? If yes, can the question be more open-ended?

Example:
1. I identify my gender as _____________.
   OR
1. I identify my gender as:
   a) man
   b) woman
   c) trans
   d) ____________ (fill in the blank)
Support your LGBTQ faculty & staff

- Do they feel hesitate to bring their partners to social functions? Are their partners made to feel welcome in the school community?
- Does the administration support teachers being open with their students about their sexuality (if it’s important to them)?
- Does the administration support LGBT teachers when concerns from parents arise?
Can a GSA really make a difference? What impacts have we noticed?

- Old Boys who have come back or emailed to express their wish that the GSA has existed when they were at our school
- Sample testimonies:

« I am so glad of your group’s bravery and good works […] my time at the school in the late 80’s was a very dark time. I seriously contemplated killing myself from the barrage of verbal and physical attacks I endured […] standing up for these principles is not based on politics, but basic ideas of respect, and right and wrong that are universal. » (email correspondence from Old Boy)
From a school-culture point of view, we were impressed by the efforts Selwyn appears to be making to create an environment in which all students feel comfortable. This includes hosting a chapter of the Gay Straight Alliance, and the rainbow triangles displayed on some staff members’ doors. We were also impressed that the library displays books by prominent female authors such as Margaret Atwood, as well as books with obvious female protagonists. The boys at Selwyn appear to be provided with opportunities to pursue interests that, in a co-ed environment, might be pigeonholed as “female”.

Excerpt from a parent application letter
When I was in high school, Selwyn had a reputation as a macho school where coaches called out poor performances by calling students wimps or girls [...] I worried that Selwyn had not changed [...] I found colleagues that not only empathized with my situation but also gave me the courage to be open with my students. To my amazement, the students were just as accepting as the teachers. [...] this accepting environment made me comfortable in my own skin while I was teaching, and it made me a better teacher.
Language has improved

‘THAT’S SO GAY.’
LET’S BE HONEST, IT’S PROBABLY NOT.

I DON’T SAY
“THAT’S SO GAY”
BECAUSE
THE WORDS
GAY & STUPID
ARE NOT
INTERCHANGEABLE.

"THAT’S SO GAY"?
TELL ME MORE ABOUT HOW
INANIMATE OBJECTS HAVE SEXUAL
PREFERENCES

Gay. Let’s get over it.
@stonewalluk facebook

© Duke University
think
Criticism & difficulties

• GLSEN 2007b – 4 types of school environments → identifying them & tips on how to deal with them
  1) Hostile school
  2) Resistant school
  3) Passive school
  4) Inclusive school

• Initial resistance – our signs were ripped down
• Attendance – how to not single out? silent resources?

• Criticism heard:
  « Not the role of a school »
  « Keep politics out of school »
  « The school made me into the man I am today. A GSA doesn’t belong. »
  « Against my religion »
• Inevitably, your school will be confronted with how it will welcome transgender students.

If a student who was born a biological female but identifies as male wants to apply to your school, will she be accepted?

• How would the staff react to the student?
• Would fellow students be accepting?
• Which issues might arise? Will she be allowed to use the boys’ washroom?
Questions?
Thank you!
Always keep an open mind.

If one GSA will be created after today, it was worth my trip.
References


